

THE NAMELESS CITY: extract

Resting the book on his knees, the Doctor opened it to the title page, the thick parchment crackling as it turned. ‘I don’t quite recognise the language,’ he murmured, index finger tracing the individual letters. ‘This looks like Sumerian, but this here is certainly one of the Vedic scripts, while this is Rongorongo from Easter Island. No, no, I’m wrong. This is older – much, much older. Where did you say you got it?’ But before his companion could reply, the Doctor’s index finger, which had been following the words in the centre of the title page, stopped, and he automatically read it aloud: ‘The Necronomicon ...’

With a shriek of pure terror, the Doctor flung the book away from him.

‘The Necronomicon.’

In a place abandoned by time, in the heart of an immeasurably tall black-glass pyramid, the words rang like a bell.

‘The Necronomicon.’

The sound hung in the air, trembling, vibrating off the glass to create thin ethereal music.

Three sinuous shapes wrapped in long trails of ragged shadow rose from a silver pool to twist through the rarefied air, moving to the gossamer music. Two more pairs detached from the four cardinal points of the thick darkness and joined the intricate mid-air dance. The seven curled and wound round one another, folding and bending to form arcane and ornately beautiful patterns, before they

finally settled into a perfect black circle. The tower's mirrored walls and floor made it look as if the darkness was alive with huge unblinking eyes.

'The Necronomicon.'

'Oh, Jamie, what have you done?' The Doctor's voice was shaking.

'I don't know ... I mean, it's just a book.'

'Oh, this is more, much more, than a book.'

The Doctor and Jamie stared at the leather-bound volume on the floor. Caught in a tangle of wire and cogs, it was pulsating with a slow, steady rhythm.

'It's like a heartbeat,' Jamie whispered. 'Doctor, I don't ... I mean, I just ...' the young Scotsman said in confusion. He leaned forward. 'Do you want me to throw it out?'

The Doctor raised his hand. 'Don't touch it!' he snapped. 'If you value your life and your sanity, you'll not touch it again.' He opened and closed his right hand into a fist. The tips of his fingers where they had touched the book were bruised and blackened.

The book's cover suddenly strobed with dull red light and a tracery of thin lines flickered across it, briefly outlining the shape of a tentacled creature etched into the black leather. The heavy cover flew open and the thick pages lifted and flapped, blowing in an unfelt wind. It finally fell open at a page showing a black-and-grey illustration of narrow pyramids and towers. Abruptly, a series of tiny golden lights – like windows – appeared on the image. A spark leaped from the pages into the tangle of wires cradling it. A second spark – like a tiny yellow

cinder – billowed up and hung in the air, before see-sawing into a spider’s web of fine silver wire on the floor. The wire immediately twisted and trembled, pulsating red and black. A fountain of sparks then erupted from the book and scattered across the floor, bouncing like tiny sizzling beads. Wires quivered and shifted with a surge of power; cogs and wheels turned and spun of their own accord.

And then the control console coughed.

It was an almost human sound, a cross between a breathy sigh and a wheeze.

‘Oh no, no, no, no, no, no ...’ The Doctor scrambled to his feet and reached for the lever in the centre of the console. He pulled hard – and it came away in his hand. He looked at it blankly. ‘Oh! Well, that’s never happened before.’